

anchorage anarchy

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The Fall of the House of Labor

Since the last issue of this zine, in which I critiqued labor unions, these organizations have been prominently in the news again. The biggest stories have been about the passage of a “right-to-work” law in Michigan and the Hostess bankruptcy, which many have blamed on greedy unions. Labor is clearly under attack from business owners and politicians, and these two events, happening so closely together, have prompted me to once again devote most of the space in *anchorage anarchy* to a consideration of the labor movement.

The Hostess with the Mostest (Corporate Thieves, that is)

When Hostess announced a couple of months ago that it was declaring bankruptcy, it publicly laid responsibility for its decision at the feet of its unions. The company said it could no longer afford the pay and benefits its employees were demanding at the negotiating table and closed its doors to most of its workers. It fired 18,500 workers with no severance and no payout of unused vacation time. Hostess said it could not pay retiree benefits and has not contributed a penny to its pension plans for a year now.

But interestingly, despite its claims that it can no longer afford the workers who actually produced the products that generated at least \$2,300,000,000 over the last year, the company petitioned for and was granted in bankruptcy court approval to pay \$1,750,000 to 19 executives as they dismantle and sell off the company. This payout does not include the \$175,000/month that will continue to be paid to

the Hostess CEO. They justified this by saying they need to have a well-run plan to offload their assets in order to pay off the \$860,000,000 they owe their “secured” creditors. Naturally the plan is to make sure these wealthy investors get whatever money can be made off the sale of the company’s remnants before they even consider putting any money towards their \$1,000,000,000 unfunded employee pension liability.

None of what happened was a surprise. Just as companies value their managers and investors/shareholders over their productive workers when their business is going well, they look out for the people at the top when things goes sour. Despite talk of corporate missions and core values and other trendy management-speak, corporations value the people who put in the money and occupy the offices over the people who put in their labor power, the people who actually produce the services and things of value that the company sells at a profit. The higher-ups claim that everyone is a stakeholder, both stockholder and worker, but they really only care about themselves and their wealthy cronies.

This basic inequality is hard-wired into capitalist businesses. In the typical corporation, the workers may create wealth and generate profits for the company for years, but they never end up having any ownership in the company, or any decision-making rights. They have no real stake in the company (even when officially considered “stakeholders”) that they own and can sell if and when they leave. The investors and stockholders on the other hand, who have

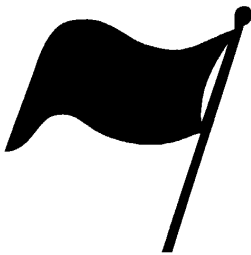
done no actual productive work, have a share in the company that they can sell or trade whenever they like, and have a legal claim to payment for in the case of a bankruptcy.

That's what happened at Hostess: the owners and managers mismanaged the company into failure (ie, it was no longer profitable enough for their tastes) and then demanded that workers take cuts in pay and benefits to maintain the profits of (non-working) investors. When the workers refused, having already given back enough, the company locked them out. Now owners and executives will all leave by deploying golden parachutes of various configurations, while the workers are on the streets with nothing. Once again the wealthy stay wealthy and the workers get poorer. And unions get the blame.

Of course, this is all made possible by the government. The bankruptcy court endorsed the outrageous payout to Hostess executives to manage the bankruptcy. The government allows corporations to be viewed as "persons" and protects individual stockholders and managers from liability for their bad decisions. It preserves property rights that make it illegal for the dispossessed Hostess workers to occupy *their* workplaces and run the business themselves. No matter how long someone works at a company or how much they contribute to corporate profit, the workers remain employees and are never allowed to own what their labor has created. The only investment in a company recognized by capitalist companies and the state is the investment of cold, hard cash—the investment of years of one's life and labor gains a worker nothing but a pension which the company will then feel free to default on.

The Right to Work (for Less)

And then there's so-called "right-to-work" laws, which were enacted in important states this year: Indiana in February and Michigan just this month. These laws prevent companies and unions from agreeing to agency shop provisions in their contract which require workers who choose not to join a union to pay a representation fee to the labor organization. The justification for such fees is that labor laws and government agencies (like the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) and National Labor Relations Board (NLRB)) require unions to represent all workers in their government-delineated bargaining unit whether they join the union or not. These unions are sometimes called majority unions because they gain status as the exclusive bargaining agent of a group of workers by winning the majority of votes in a representation election. This eliminates any competing unions in the workplace, but is



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gained at the cost of being required to represent non-members.

Where there is no mandatory fee, the dues of members subsidize the costs of representing the free-riders who pay nothing to the labor organization but gain all the benefits granted under a collective bargaining agreement, including representation by union stewards during grievance procedures and even legal counsel paid for by co-workers if a case goes to arbitration. This can be quite costly and the added expense of representing folks who don't pay dues can restrict the ability of unions to put funds towards organizing other workers, maintaining union-run benefits plans, or reimbursing members for the time spent negotiating contracts and representing fellow-workers.

That is exactly the reason business-owners and their allies in government support right-to-work laws. When unions are weak and poor, they are less able to organize new workplaces, which means new enterprises can more easily open and do business as non-union operations, paying workers less and granting more meager benefits. Businesses see dollar signs from increased profits and politicians who are allied to them lust after corporate donations and increased tax revenues from businesses that move into these "right-to-work" states. According to these anti-union folks, wages are about 10% less in these states, but unemployment is also lower, by about the same percentage.

Even if these figures are accurate, the anti-union argument is an elaborate charade. Unions do not bankrupt companies, corporate greed does. When unionized workers make more money, owners may make less than they otherwise would, but never as little as their employees. Companies don't run away from unions because their stockholders are being forced to get foodstamps. It's just that, in their



eyes, they never can make enough money. If some profit is good, more is better, and it doesn't matter if they leave behind an impoverished workforce when they close up shop and move to a more company-friendly state. If they really were interested in making sure that everyone had the real right to work, that everyone who wanted a job had one, they would give up a little of their profit and share the wealth by hiring more workers themselves. But that is not their "business model." They no more believe in any universal right to work than anti-abortionists believe in a universal right to life.

Labor, Heal Thyself

But whatever the real motivations of these anti-union campaigners, the way unions have traditionally done business has opened them to valid criticism. Unions do use a portion of member dues for lobbying and other political activities. They do overpay bureaucrats and other hacks who commonly make more money than the workers they are charged with representing. They do take political positions in conflict with the views of at least some of their members. These kinds of things breed resentment on the part of non-members forced to pay fees to these organizations, and even among some of their members, as well.

And unions have themselves to blame for the fact they must represent non-members. The establishment labor movement accepts, in fact endorses, majority unionism as the model for american labor relations. The unions supported passage of NLRA and still believe it was the



natural culmination of their efforts to organize american workers. Part of that devil's bargain with the state and business was that unions gained protection from competition in the workplace by accepting the requirement to represent non-members. And the big unions show no interest in giving up majority unionism. But if these unions fail to reconsider their organizing strategies, internal structures, and political alliances, they run the risk of going out of business entirely in the face of the current offensive by the "right-to-work" types.

A Union of Egoists?

As I noted in the July *anchorage anarchy*, the labor movement has failed to live up to its promise as a force for fundamental social change. Recent events make me even more concerned about the future of trade unions in this country. While I remain very critical of mainstream unions, they do remain at least a partial buffer against corporate predation on

workers. The earnings of the wealthiest 1% increased 5.5% last year while earnings fell by 1.7% for the least wealthy 80%. Unions, despite their numerous faults, have traditionally been a counterweight to such disparities in wealth and income. Most of us would be worse off economically without them.

Unions need to clean up their internal messes and purge themselves of the bureaucrats and politicians that have run the movement into the ground. They also need to distance themselves from the state and politicians if there is any chance of revitalizing the labor movement. Obama bailed-out business owners and banks while sacrificing workers and homeowners. State legislatures in the old industrial states which for years supported unions are now passing right-to-work laws. And government-enforced majority unionism is coming around to bite the unions in the arse. The labor movement needs to stop seeking shelter under NLRA and try some new approaches.

In this issue I am publishing an article that first appeared in the anarchist and individualist zine *The Storm* in its winter 1982/1983 issue. In it Maureen Flannery tells of her experience with a minority, individualist, free union in 1960s San Francisco. It demonstrates what can be achieved by people acting freely on their own behalf—without bureaucrats, with mandatory dues, without the NLRB. I am also publishing a letter from Peter Lamborn Wilson which I received in response to the last issue. Since I had already planned to run Maureen's article before I received Peter's letter, it was an interesting synchronicity that he, too, points out that an individualist/egoist approach is better than a collectivist one in labor organizing (as well as in every other area of social life). Enjoy.



The Geopolitics of Dead Children and Guns

Seemingly unending coverage in the establishment news media. Flags at half-mast. Crocodile tears from the hypocrite-in-chief. Millions of dollars in charitable donations to the families and friends of the victims. It is as if the killing of a group of children and their keepers in a Connecticut school is a uniquely tragic event—one that not only is presumed to touch us all on a visceral level but also justifies a re-examination of how the government regulates guns. The question for me, however, is: what is it about this massacre that makes it more heinous than so many other instances of the murder of innocents?

The main reason appears to be that these were americans. When a united states soldier murdered 16 non-combatants in afghanistan earlier this year, the president shed no tears and people in this country were largely untroubled, even though nine of those victims were children. Nor was there more than a passing mention in the american press when NATO forces killed nine afghan kids collecting firewood last year. When american bombs and bullets supposedly directed at “terrorists” kill peaceable afghan civilians of all ages, as they so frequently do, not only is there no public mourning in america, but the government tries to cover up their crimes and deny their role in these murders for as long as they can get away with. The powers-that-be in the military and the government, as well as the average american, clearly believe that the slaughter of non-combatants is an acceptable cost of doing business when making war in a foreign land to “defend our freedom.” The double-standard applied here is obvious.

The Blame Game

However one feels about the disparate reactions, genuine or staged, to these very similar events, what is most troubling to me is

the political hay that is being made out of the school shootings. Those who believe that regular, non-coercive people should be deprived of weapons are using the killings as a justification for further regulation—if not the outright elimination—of non-government gun ownership. The NRA, while defending gun ownership, blames violent video games and movies, as well as inadequate surveillance of “mentally ill” people. Obama talks cryptically of using “whatever power” he has to prevent another school shooting in the united states.

All the laying of blame on privately-owned guns or violent images in entertainment or crazy people is simply laying the foundation for an increase in government control over peaceful individuals and new limits on our freedom of action. Millions of people watch action movies, play shoot-em-up video games and/or own guns—and vanishingly few of them go on shooting sprees. Most people burdened with the label of mental illness or madness are not violent and seldom think of doing harm to anyone but themselves. Looking for easy targets to make the citizenry feel that their overseers in government are genuinely interested in protecting them and their children will not make people safer. More restrictive laws enacted in response to these misperceived threats, however, will surely have a negative impact on personal liberty.

People are open to such scapegoating because they are unwilling to hold individuals responsible for their actions. We hear that the causes of violence are complex. Really? In this case one person decided for some reason unknown to anyone else to attack the students and staff in an elementary school. He did it. He is responsible. He is the cause. Labeling him mentally ill may appear to provide some insight into his actions, but really explains nothing.

While the common perception may be that crazy people are not responsible for their actions due to some mysterious “illness,” this begs the question of who or what then is. Violent imagery or firearms did not seize control of his mind—he made a choice and acted on it. And the american military personnel who massacre people in afghanistan, or pakistan, or iraq, or wherever else they feels like going, are just as much individually responsible for the mayhem they cause. According to the president and military officials, it’s always either an accident, or bad “intelligence,” or an individual nutcase controlled by a “mental illness” that is to blame. The perps are never considered responsible for their actions.



Violent Influences

Even if one were to believe that societal glamorization of violence plays a role in provoking some people to actually kill others, the focus should not be on fantasy violence in games and movies. Let’s look critically instead at the very real violence carried out routinely by agents of the state. The president has nothing but praise for the military whose everyday

violence is largely supported and applauded by people in this country. In fact he watched live coverage of the killing of an unarmed Osama bin Laden and cheered on the killers in real time. Obama has no need for the tawdry violent images available to the masses in the theaters and on iBox—he can get off watching the real thing. He called the killings in Connecticut “senseless.” Apparently the killings he orders or excuses are “sensible” in his eyes. Individual killers are demented and crazed, while organized military killers are heroic and patriotic.

Violence by police and federal agents like the FBI and DEA is also routinely defended and justified by politicians, the news media, and popular entertainment. Television is dominated by shows depicting law enforcement thugs bullying and beating people, and the reason these shows are popular is because people generally accept and even approve of such behavior on the part of real cops. Violent images would not be so popular with so many if they were not already enamored of the actual violence carried out by their idols in the military and police agencies.

Swords into Ploughshares?

So, if the president really wants to do everything in his power to stop violence and murder, perhaps he should start in his own backyard. He can stop the war in afghanistan immediately. He can stop the DEA from continuing its lethal “war on drugs” tomorrow. He can stop funding the war machine, which is the real stimulus for the weapons industry—international arms trading engaged in by governments and their contractors has flooded the world with weapons and death; gun shows in american cities are a minor distraction.

But this ain’t gonna happen. Instead, he and the other politicians are going to go after the low-hanging fruit like violent images, private gun ownership, or folks labeled mentally ill.

Needless to say, while this approach will reduce individuals' freedom of choice and action, it will not prevent future acts of violence by people who have made the decision to kill. Even an outright ban on private gun ownership will not stop murder. It is absurd to believe that someone planning to kill people (which is also against the law) will be deterred from obtaining a gun because it is illegal to possess one. More restrictive gun laws would simply make it even harder for individuals unwilling to break the law to protect themselves from violent others—just as the ban on guns in schools denied the teachers and other school workers in Connecticut the only means by which they could have defended themselves and their charges. Government officials seek political gain by cranking out feel-good, but ultimately unhelpful, propaganda and legislation, while they refuse to make the substantive changes in the government agencies they control that would immediately reduce the burden of violence against innocent people here and around the world.

Means and Ends

If we accept the view that people are the mindless receptacles of outside influences and are driven to violence by images, illness, and access to weapons, then our efforts to preserve our already severely restricted personal liberties,

as well as the prospect of moving towards a more libertarian society, are doomed to failure. If those of us who choose not to join the military or police cannot be trusted with guns and need to be protected from stylized violence in games and movies, how can we possibly be trusted to live our lives on our own terms, unmolested by politicians, cops, and soldiers.

The basic anarchist goal of a voluntary, cooperative society is based on the premise that each individual is capable of making choices and acting on them, and should be free to do so, without being directed or supervised by the state. We also recognize that some individuals will make bad choices and violence will never disappear. Different individuals and voluntary groupings will need to figure out ways to protect themselves and their associates without creating authoritarian structures of control. What that would look like would vary from place to place and person to person, but there is no place in a free society for preventing non-coercive individuals from owning guns or producing and viewing any sort of image they wish to. Nor would free people find it acceptable to discriminate against and scapegoat people whose thought processes are different or odd. And if these practices would be unacceptable in a libertarian society, they are just as indefensible in our current authoritarian world.



Union of Egoists

A recollection by Maureen Flannery

Individual anarchy has often been treated as an interesting idea, but one with little bearing on practical group work. However, during the late sixties in San Francisco, an individualist anarchist labor union (or “non-union” as it was later called) was organized with features unique in American labor history.

Initially, we were a small group of social workers who revolted against an AFL union, local 400, after repeated instances in which the AFL failed to act on issues. These issues included firings without pretext with five minutes notice, refusal of the labor council to fund publication of the social services newsletter, *DIALOG*, and the dismissal of a worker for visiting North Vietnam during personal leave. This last item precipitated an administrative proposal for an “incompatible activities code,” which would have invaded the private lives of city workers to determine the suitability of their political or personal beliefs. Launching a mammoth publicity campaign we defeated the initiative. This was 1966, and almost a decade later this dangerous concept was revived with reference to employee sexual preferences.

By this time we had severed relations with the AFL, establishing an independent Social Services Employees Union (SSEU), complete with small office and printing equipment. Although we comprised various political tendencies, we all had reservations about having paid officials or any kind of dominating leadership. After a period of experimentation with acts of defiance—immediately followed by firings—we decided to utilize more subtle methods of dissent that relied upon communication with other workers to generate wide support and avoid martyrdom.

We utilized open and reasoned publicity, direct confrontation with immediate supervisors over specific issues, with self-representation. We managed to make any supervisor as answerable for his actions as a “subordinate” via wide dissemination of interviews. Notoriety often left a supervisor vulnerable to power structures above, and it is surprising to see how many lost face in the simplest interview. Through a series of meetings with department officials, a grievance procedure was implemented and written into the civil service code which allowed any grievant the right to a hearing with three representatives and as many witnesses as necessary to support his/her case. For any career-minded supervisor, it was more risky to get one’s name in print too often than to tolerate insubordination. As a result, firings were almost eliminated and many supervisors started to hide in their offices. The “right” of the supervisor to pass judgement and document the behavior of those supervised simply became the reverse tool of workers.



These ideas were later incorporated into a constitution stating that “SSEU is organized to give workers an opportunity to have some voice in determining the conditions under which they work. Contrary to a style of operation in which

the individual abdicates action and responsibility to a union official, a lawyer, or a politician, SSEU stresses the individual's participation by collective action in the decision-making processes which govern his life...by helping provide workers with the opportunity to know the policies which govern them and then confront the public bodies which control and administer these policies. Such an approach necessarily requires openness and the courage to claim responsibility for actions, losses, and victories. It is also the antithesis of clandestine deals, political compromises and the corruption which characterizes many of the actions of organized labor...members need not gain any union sanction for such actions, nor do their leaflets reflect the opinions of all other workers. They are expected, however, to take public responsibility for what they publicize and do. SSEU members generally choose to operate within the sphere of immediate working conditions and problems rather than issues of foreign policy, prison reform, ecology, or other popular hobbies, since most of our experiences have shown that persons can exert the greatest leverage in the situations immediately affecting them."

After some heated confrontations, we were able to have five representatives at social and civil service commission hearings, again with all incidents reported in leaflets. Another prerogative of authority was inverted as workers were given the pseudo-rights of administrators.

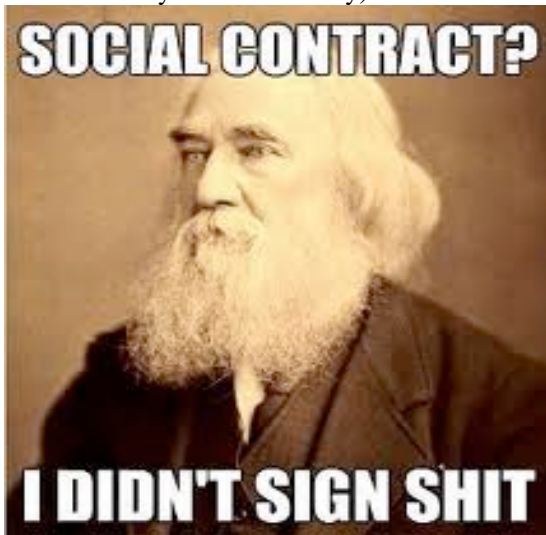
At this point, when the SSEU methods were achieving their greatest success and membership was high, a number of obstacles were placed in the way of the union's development. Local 400, alarmed at the inroads being made by a small independent organization, hired an impressive organizer, Harold Supriano, who had ironically been our catalyst at the time of his North Vietnam excursion. Another invasion came from the Progressive Labor Party who

dispatched a "vanguard" to work at the welfare department and convert SSEU into a conventional union, with membership in the AFL, a "contract" demanding exclusive bargaining power, and mandatory SSEU membership. Once established, the paid officials of such a group could then lay down a centralized "union line" and direct all union activity.



The "people's army" did make a number of smart advances, although Harold Supriano, a less serious threat, just faded off into the sunset of North Beach cafes. Progressive Labor, no such slouchers, within a few months gained control of *DIALOG*, filling the paper with pro-collective bargaining editorials, sought to institute a rigid editorial policy, which would subject all submitted material to some sort of judgement, rejecting all contrary opinions, and refused to appeal decisions to the membership. After a long and bitter battle their platforms were defeated 2-1, and many either left the department or joined local 400. The incident eroded much of our strength, but reconfirmed SSEU's commitment to the absence of paid leadership, and the requirement that the *DIALOG* editor accept articles from every point of view, and the prohibition of the union's entering into any contract that would inhibit the freedom of the individual member to join freely with anyone to determine the conditions of his working life.

Later amendments to the constitution included voluntary dues, access to printing equipment by all department employees as long as materials were paid for or replaced, all offices to be voluntary, no mandatory insurance benefits (most SSEU people felt that these items offered by conventional unions were simply recruitment devices, that the employer should be the one to bear any financial costs rather than unions with inflationary dues structures, and that in any case all insurance programs should be entered into by free choice only).



Essentially we were a fraternal collective existing for mutual support on a positive level only; we could not as a group act to forbid any member from doing anything he/she wanted. This was a complete departure from conventional unions which derive their “power” from their ability to commandeer or discipline membership. There are precedents in history for such alliances, particularly in pre-hellenic Greece where various artisans and craftsmen comprised independent brotherhoods for defense and support. These were far more complex and progressive than the later medieval guilds which mainly fixed prices and provided welfare.

We forestalled the collective bargaining ordinance for a few years by working with some other minority unions. But it became apparent that the city wanted workers more effectively organized into one union, or at least a few big ones, so that meetings could be closed for anyone not authorized by a labor corporation or a city corporation.

During 1970 and again 1974 there were city strikes. The main issue was of course “collective bargaining,” a tedious litany hailed by cigar smoking union officials in blue silk and ambitious “radicals” in blue denim. A few nonsensical demands were thrown in as a good smokescreen (none of which were ever granted or even mentioned after the strike) along with a lot of cries of “the brotherhood of labor.” Local #535 was created.

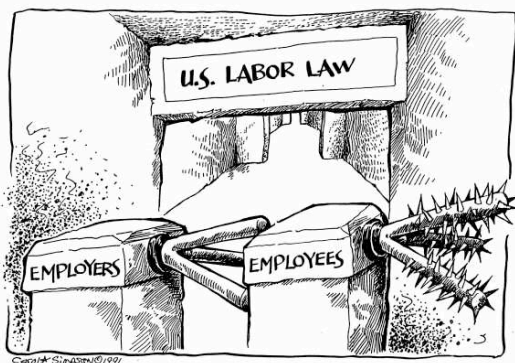
In one year the entire grievance procedure was overturned, salaries for some groups like electricians and nurses were actually reduced and their memberships turned over as prize captives to the Service Employees International. Small unions and even some large groups like the California Nurses Association were wiped out. Even local 535, set up as a dummy group to reattract social workers, was eventually devoured by its mentor, Local 400.

Although television and the press portrayed this farce as some giant war between city labor and management, most AFL people were given easy jobs. Announcements for strikes were circulated by several department heads who also told those workers who did not want to strike to stay home. And although 75% of the workers did not want to strike, the division administrator, a local 400 official, refused them access to facilities. (As you know, during a strike employees are not paid—and civil service workers risk losing their jobs.)

Naturally, we were among the groups opposing the strikes and showing up for work wherever possible. Although we issued

bulletins suggesting on-the-site strikes over specific issues, in the eyes of young and old mystics who honor holy words instead of reality—we were seen as scabs. Defending ourselves from this taboo epitaph wasted a good deal of time and paper. A lot of our former activity ceased, even the publication of *DIALOG*.

The contract agreement finally reached gave exclusive bargaining rights to large city-wide unions with Service Employees International. It eliminated public hearings at social or civil service commissions and prevented workers from filing complaints on their own initiative. All grievances had to be screened through one's majority union and membership or its dues equivalent became mandatory. The AFL could have a city department fire any worker not complying with this provision. During this ugly battle I saw police dogs patrol workers' meeting halls. A local 250 agent assaulted a friend of mine, and I witnessed dissenters being dragged from a meeting by hired security personnel. It is a small wonder that even conservative politicians pay homage to our "great labor tradition." Management is superfluous with the efficiency of this sort of control.

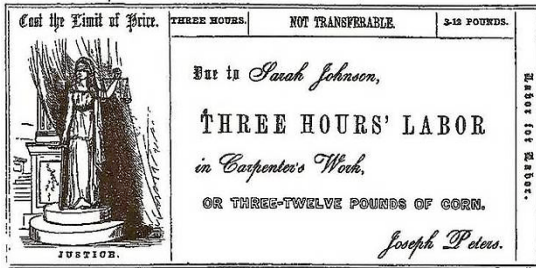


Without the right to represent ourselves as a minority union, of course we were put out of business. The experiment was not entirely a failure. A completely anarchistic organization

existed for approximately nine years as an effective union with neither unity or discipline. We actually operated more efficiently without restraints. When dues were made voluntary, people offered more; when all members or department workers were given access to our office, nothing was damaged or stolen. Without harassing other workers who might not agree with all our principles, firings were almost eliminated, salaries increased, and our treasury remained in the black.

Although I personally found the midnight efforts to improve the quality of an essentially boring job dubious, the opportunity to see myths of political labels and rigid organizational trappings dispelled made my own participation worthwhile. The entire experience was an education in anarchy that could not have been possible through any lecture or periodical. There were flaws that would have contributed to the group's eventual demise, even without the AFL. Meetings were endless; sometimes four nights a week until midnight or later. The democratic framework necessitated some of this but simple obsession with triviality accounted for a good deal. Oddly enough too little attention was paid to the collective bargaining threat. Morale was low after 1970. To many, selling your body in work bondage to the government as a social worker or teacher was just the only alternative to low-paid clerical work in private industry. Many of the best activists went on to graduate school; social worker positions afterwards became scarce. Our directness and honesty often left us vulnerable to organizations like Local 535, who used underground work and alternatives to 9-5 slavery. It should have been of more importance to anarchists. And time spent at meetings could have been put to more egoistic and practical ends.

However, this is all hindsight. The level of comradery, and the complete freedom of action



and speech have utterly spoiled me. I have not seen the atmosphere of SSEU duplicated in any other organizations—including anarchist ones. And we won several successful grievances. One of these eliminated the dress codes, which seems irrelevant to those who think only along macro-political lines—but was important in terms of having sovereignty over one's own body and expression. Another was a grievance issued by one worker whose superior wanted him to “be friendly with all the workers in the unit” and arranged little coffee meetings to instill this sort of “unit spirit.” The worker thought it absurd and demeaning, and that who he chose to be friendly with was a personal matter unrelated to his actual job. (Hearing how people today dress “to impress the boss” and read tasteless manuals on effective communication on the job, I sometimes wonder if we are entering a period of mental atrophy.) And the last successful grievance concerned an eligibility supervisor who became subject to blackmail due to his homosexuality.

Our “non-union” union believed that what happened to an individual during his or her everyday life was of more political significance than classes, creeds, political organizations, or economic systems. In any given situation there was only the exploited and the exploiter. For us, Anarchy was neither a theory for mental masturbation nor a religion providing eternal salvation on some future judgement day. Rather, it was a tool we used to maximize our abilities to withstand those who sought to prevent us from being ourselves.

Letter to the Editor

Dear Joe,

Good article on unions. I agree—and have been a member of several over the years, including a short-lived IWW Arts Branch in NYC, with members of the Living Theater and WBAI (Pacifica). It's no accident that Stirner spoke of a *union of self-owning ones* as the only possible strong (or even militant) organizational form for individualist anarchists. Our Italian Leftwing Stirnerite guru “Brand” Arrigoni used to say the same, as did George Sorel (before he lurched to the Right). See also Bob Black's excellent article on the IWW in the new magazine *Modern Slavery*. Unfortunately we now seem to be nearly as far removed from the possibility of a real radical labor union, as from Proudhon's Mutualism or Landauer's version of Kropotkin's anarcho-federalism. As the whole Movement of the Social appears moribund, no other organizational form seems possible for us but the “gang”—or as I once tried to put it more elegantly—the *Tong*. But how to organize a “secret society” in an age without secrecy (a.k.a. privacy)? Anarchist anthropologists like David Graeber and James C Scott talk about *reversion* to “earlier” economic forms such as swidden gardening—or even “the Gift”—but I sense no willingness amongst modern anarchists to embrace the luddism which would be required to “leave Civilization behind” to any real extent. Individual revolt alone seems to remain possible—every moment lived outside the Technopathocracy is an act of propaganda by the deed.

Desperate Times,
Peter Lamborn Wilson

